

THREE STORIES

J.D. SALINGER

The Ocean Full of Bowling Balls

J. D. Salinger

His shoes turned up. My mother used to tell my father that he was buying Kenneth's shoes too large for him, or to please ask somebody if his feet were deformed. But I think his shoes turned up because he was always stopping on the grass, rolling his seventy-five or eighty pounds forward to look at things, to turn things over his fingers. Even his moccasins turned up.

He had straight new penny-red hair, after my mother, which he parted on the left side and combed unwetted. He never wore a hat and you could identify him at great distances. One afternoon at the club when I was teeing off with Helen Beebers, just as I pressed my pin and ball into the hard, winter-rules ground and was getting into my stance, I felt certain that if I turned around I would see Kenneth. Confidently I turned around. Sixty yards or so away, behind the high wire fence, he was sitting on the bicycle, watching us. He had that kind of red hair.

He used a southpaw's first basemen's mitt. On the back of the fingers of the mitt he copied down lines of poetry in India ink. He said he liked to read it when he wasn't at bat or when nothing special was going on in the field. By the time he was eleven he had read all the poetry we had in the house. He liked Blake and Keats best, and some of Coleridge very well, but I didn't know until over a year ago - and I used to read his glove regularly, - what his last careful entry had been. When I was still at Fort Dix a letter came from my brother Holden, who wasn't in the Army then, saying he had been horsing around in the garage and had found Kenneth's mitt. Holden said that on the thumb of the mitt was one he hadn't seen, and what was it anyway, and Holden copied down the lines. They were Browning's "I would hate that death bandaged my eyes and forbore, and bade me creep past." They weren't such hilarious lines quoted by a kid with the severest kind of heart trouble.

He was crazy about baseball. When he couldn't get up a game, and when I wasn't around to knock out flies to him, for hours he would throw a baseball up on the slant of the garage roof and catch it on the roll down. He knew the batting and fielding averages of every player in the major leagues. But he wouldn't and didn't go to any of the games with me. He went just once with me, when he was about eight years old, and had seen Lou Gehrig strike out twice. He said he didn't want to see anyone really good strike out again.

"I'm going back to Literature again, I can't keep this thing under control."

He cared for prose as well as poetry; chiefly fiction. He used to come into my room at any hour of the day and take one of my books down from the case and go off with it to his room or to the porch. I rarely looked up to see what he was reading. In those days I was trying to write. Very tough work. Very pasty-faced work. But once in a while I looked up. One time I saw him walk out with F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Tender is the Night", and another time he asked me what Richard Hughes' "The Innocent Voyage" was about. I told him, and he read it, but the only thing he would say about it, when I asked him later, was that the earthquake was fine, and the colored fella in the beginning. Another day he took from my room and read Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw". When he finished it, for a week he wouldn't talk to anyone in the house.

I'm doing fine.

I can remember every detail of that tricky, dirty Saturday in July, though.

My parents were at the summer theater singing a first matinee performance of "You Can't Take It With You". In summer stock productions they were two very irritable,

passion-tearing, perspiring players, and my younger brothers and I rarely went to see them. My mother was especially poor in summer stock. Watching her, even on a cool evening, Kenneth used to cringe in his seat till he was almost on the floor.

On that Saturday I had been working in my room all morning, had even eaten my lunch there, and not till late afternoon did I come downstairs. At about three-thirty I came out on the porch and the Cape Cod air made me a little dizzy, as though it were stuff brewed too strong. But in a minute it seemed like a pretty good day. The sun was hot all over the lawn. I looked around for Kenneth and saw him sitting in the cracked wicker, reading, with his feet drawn underneath him so that he was supporting his weight on his insteps. He was reading with his mouth open, and he didn't hear me walk across the porch and sit down on the railing opposite his chair.

I kicked his chair with the toe of my shoe. "Stop reading, Mac" I said. "Put down that book. Entertain me." He was reading Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises."

He put down the book when I spoke to him, recognizing my mood, and looked up at me, smiling. He was a gentleman; a twelve year-old gentleman; he was a gentleman all his life.

"I get lonesome up there," I told him. "I picked a lousy profession. If I ever write a novel I think I'll join a choir or something and run to meetings between chapters."

He asked me what he knew I wanted him to ask me. "Vincent, what's the new story about?"

"Listen, No kidding Kenneth. It's terrific. Really," I said, getting set to convince us both. "It's called 'The Bowler'. It's about this guy whose wife won't let him listen to the fights or the hockey matches on the radio at night. No sports. Too noisy. Terrible woman. Won't ever let the guy read cowboy stories. Bad for his mind. Throws all his cowboy story magazines into the wastebasket." I watched Kenneth's face like a writer. "Every Wednesday night is this guy's night to go bowling. After dinner every Wednesday night he takes his special bowling ball down

from a shelf of the closet, puts it in a special little round canvas bag, kisses his wife good-night and goes out. This goes on for eight years. Finally he dies. Every Monday night his wife goes to the cemetery, puts gladioli on his grave. One day she goes on a Wednesday instead of a Monday, and sees some fresh violets on the grave. Can't imagine who could have put 'em there. She asks the old caretaker, and he says, 'Oh, that there same lady that comes every Wednesday. His wife, I guess.'

'His *wife*?' screams the wife. '*I'm* his wife!' But the old caretaker is a pretty deaf old guy and he isn't much interested. The woman goes home. Late in the night her neighbors hear the crashing sound of broken glass, but they go on listening to the hockey game on the radio. In the morning, on his way to the office, the neighbor sees a broken window in the next house, and a bowling ball, all dewey, glistening on the front lawn."

"How do you like it?"

He hadn't taken his eyes off my face while I had told him the story.

"Aw, Vincent," he said. "Aw, gee."

"What's the matter? That's a damn good story."

"I know you'll write it swell. But, gee, Vincent!"

I said to him, "that's the last story I'm going to read to you, Caulfield. What's the matter with that story? It's a masterpiece. I'm writing one masterpiece after another. I never read so many masterpieces by one man." He knew I was kidding, but he only gave me half a smile because he knew I was blue. I didn't want any half smiles. "What's the matter with that story?" I said. "You little stinker. You redhead."

"Maybe it *could've* happened, Vincent. But you don't *know* that it happened do you? I mean, you just made it up didn't you?"

"Sure I made it up! That kind of stuff *happens* Kenneth."

"Sure, Vincent! I believe ya! No kidding, I believe ya," Kenneth said. But if you're just making stuff up, why don't you make up something that's good. See? If you just made up something good, is what I mean. *Good* stuff happens. Lots of times. Boy, Vincent! You could be writing about good stuff. You could write about good stuff, I mean about good guys and all. Boy, Vincent!" He looked at me with his eyes shining – yes, shining. The boy's eyes could shine.

"Kenneth," I said – but I knew I was licked; "this guy with the bowling ball is a good guy. There's nothing wrong with him. It's just his wife that isn't a good guy."

"Sure, I know, but – boy, Vincent! You're taking revenge for him and all. Wuddya wanna take revenge on him for? I mean. Vincent. He's all right. Let her alone. The lady, I mean. She doesn't know what she's doing. I mean about the radio and the cowboy stories and all," Kenneth said. "Let her alone, huh, Vincent? Okay?"

I didn't say anything.

"Don't have her throw that thing out the window. That bowling ball. Huh, Vincent? Okay?"

I nodded, "Okay," I said.

I got up and went inside to the kitchen and drank a bottle of ginger ale. He knocked me out. He always knocked me out. Then I went upstairs and tore up the story.

I came down and sat on the porch railing again, and watched him read. He looked up at me abruptly.

"Let's drive down to Lassiter's for some steamers," He said.

"All right. You want to put on a coat or something?" He only had on a striped T-shirt, and he got sunburnt the way red haired people get sunburnt.

"No I'm all right." He stood up, dropping his book on the seat of the wicker. "Let's just go. Right away," he said.

Rolling down my shirtsleeves, I followed him across the lawn, stopping at the edge of it, and watched him back my car out of the garage. When he had backed it into the driveway a ways, I walked over. He slid over to the right as I got into the driver's seat, and began to lower his window – it was still in a raised position from my date with Helen Beebers the night before; she didn't use to like her hair to blow. Then Kenneth pressed the dash button, and the canvas top, helped by an overhead slam of my hand, began to go to its act, collapsing finally behind the seat.

I pulled out of the driveway and into Caruck Boulevard and out of Caruck onto Ocean. It was about a seven mile drive to Lassiter's, on Ocean. The first couple of miles neither of us had anything to say. The sun was terrific. It showed up my pasty hands; ribbon-inky and nail-bitten at the fingers; but it struck and settled handsomely on Kenneth's red hair, and that seemed fair enough. I said to him, "Reach in that there compartment, Doctor. You'll find a package of cigarettes and a fifty-thousand dollar bill. I'm planning to send Lassiter through college. Hand me a cigarette."

He handed over the cigarettes, saying, "Vincent, you oughtta marry Helen. No kidding. She's going nuts, waiting around. She's not so smart or anything but that's good. You wouldn't have to argue with her so much. And you wouldn't hurt her feelings when you're sarcastic. I been watching her. She never knows what you're talking about. Boy, that's good! And boy, does she have swell legs."

"Why, Doctor!"

"No. No kidding, Vincent. You oughtta marry her. I played checkers with her once. You know what she did with her kings?"

"What'd she do with her kings?"

"She kept them all in the back row so I wouldn't take them. She didn't want to use them at all. Boy, that's a good kind of girl, Vincent! And you remember that time that I caddied for her? You know what she does?"

"She uses my tees. She won't use her own tees."

"You know the fifth hole? Where that big tree is right before you get to the green? She asked me to throw her ball over that ole tree. She said she never can throw it over. Boy, that's the kind of girl you wanna marry, Vincent. You don't wanna let her get away."

"I won't." It was as though I were talking to a man twice my age.

"You will if you let your stories kill you. Don't worry about them so much. You'll be good. You'll be terrific."

We rode on, me, very happy.

"Vincent."

"What."

"When you look in that crib they got Phoebe in, are you nuts about her? Don't you feel like you're even her?"

"Yes," I said, listening to him, knowing just what he meant. "Yes."

"Are you nuts about Holden too?"

"Sure. Nice fella."

"Don't be so reticent." Kenneth said.

"All right."

"Tell everybody when you love somebody, and how much." Kenneth said.

"All right."

"Drive faster, Vincent," he said "really step on that thing."

"I gave the car all it could take, getting it up to about seventy-five.

"Attaboy!" Kenneth said.

In just a couple of minutes we were at Lassiter's joint. It was an off hour and there was only one car, a De Soto sedan, in the parking space; it looked locked and hot, but not oppressive because we were feeling pretty slick. We sat down at a table outside on the screened porch. At the other end of the porch a fat, baldheaded man in a yellow polo shirt sat eating blue points. He had a newspaper propped up against a salt shaker. He looked very lonesome and very much the owner of the hot, empty big sedan baking outside in the parking space.

While I tipped my chair back, trying to catch sight of Lassiter through the fly-buzzy hallway to the bar, the fat man spoke up.

"Hey Red, where'dja get that red hair?"

Kenneth turned around to look at the man, and said:

"A guy gave it to me on the road."

That nearly killed the guy. He was bald as a pear. "A guy gave it to you on the road, eh?" he said. "Think he could fix me up?"

"Sure." Kenneth said. "You gotta give him a blue card, though. Last year's. He won't take this year's."

That really killed the guy. "Gotta give him a blue card, eh?" he asked, shaking.

"Yeah. Last year's." Kenneth told him.

The fat man shook on as he turned back to his newspaper; and after that he looked over at our table frequently, as though he had pulled up a chair.

Just as I started to get up, Lassiter rounded the corner of his bar and saw me sitting there. He raised thick eyebrows in greeting, and started to come forward. He was a dangerous number. I had seen him, late at night, break an empty quart beer bottle against his bar, and holding on to what was left of the neck of it, go out into the dark, salty air looking for a man whom he merely suspected of stealing fancy radiator caps from cars in his

parking space. Now, coming down the hallway, he couldn't wait to ask me: "You got that smart redhead brother a yours with you?" He couldn't see where Kenneth was until he was out on the porch. I nodded to him.

"Well!" he said to Kenneth, "How you doin kid?" I ain't seen you around much this summer.

"I was here last week. How you doin Mr. Lassiter? You beat anybody up lately?"

Lassiter chuckled with his mouth open. "What'll it be, kid? Steamers? Lotta butter sauce?" Getting the big nod, he started to go out to the kitchen, but stopped to ask:

"Where's your brother? The little crazy one?"

"Holden," I identified. "He's away at summer camp. He's learning to shift for himself."

"Oh, yeah?" said Lassiter, interested.

"He isn't crazy." Kenneth told Lassiter.

"Ain't crazy?" Lassiter said. "If he ain't crazy, what is he?"

Kenneth stood up. His face was almost the color of his hair. "Let's get the hell out of here." Kenneth said to me. "C'mon."

"Aw, wait a minute, kid," Lassiter said quickly. "Listen, I'm only kidding. He ain't crazy. I didn't mean *that*. He's just mischeevious like. Be a good kid. I didn't say he was *crazy*. Be a good kid. Lemme bring ya some nice steamers."

With his fists clenched, Kenneth looked at me, but I gave him no sign, leaving it up to him. He sat down. "Be your age," he told Lassiter. "Gee! Don't go calling names."

"Don't get tough with Red, Lassiter!" the fat man called from the table. Lassiter didn't pay any attention to him – he was that tough.

"I got some beauty steamers, kid" he told Kenneth.

"Sure Mr. Lassiter."

Lassiter actually stumbled his way up the single step leading to the hallway.

When we left I told Lassiter the steamers had been swell, but he looked doubtful until Kenneth slapped him on the back.

We got back in the car, and Kenneth dropped down the door of the side compartment and comfortably propped one foot into the cavity. I drove the five miles up to Reechman Point because I felt we both wanted to go there.

At the point I pulled the car up at the old spot, and we got out and started to stride from stone to stone down to what Holden used to call, for some reason of his own, the Wise Guy Rock. It was a big, flat job about a run and a jump from the ocean. Kenneth led the way...balancing himself by holding out his arms like a tight-rope walker. My legs were longer and I could go from rock to rock with one hand in my pants pocket. Also, I had several years head start on him.

We both sat down on the Wise Guy Rock. The ocean was calm and it had a good color, but there was something I didn't like about it. Almost the instant I noticed there was something I didn't like about it, the sun went under a cloud. Kenneth said something to me.

"What?" I asked him.

"I forgot to tell ya. I got a letter from Holden today. I'll read it to you" He took an envelope out of the hip pocket of his shorts. I watched the ocean and listened. "Listen to the thing at the top. The heading." Kenneth said, and started to read the letter which came in this form.

Camp Goodrest
for slobs

Friday

Dear Kenneth,

This place stinks. I never saw so many rats. You have to make stuff out of leather and go for hikes. They got a

contest between the reds and the whites. I am supposed to be a white. I am no lousy white. I am coming home soon and will have some fun with you and Vincent and eat some clams with you. They eat eggs that are runny here all the time and they don't even put the milk in the icebox when you drink it.

Everybody has got to sing a song in the dining room. This Mr. Grover thinks he is a hot singer and tried to get me to sing with him last night. I would of, only I don't like him. He smiles at you but is all the time very mean when he gets the chance. I got the 18\$ mother gave me and will probly be home soon maybe saturday or sunday if that man goes in to town like he said so I can get a train. They got me austersized now for not singing in the dining room with Mr. Grover. None of these rats can talk to me. One is a very nice boy from Tenesee and is near as old as Vincent. How is Vincent. Tell him I miss him. Ask him if he ever read corinthans. Corinthans is in the bible and is very good and pretty and Web tailer read me some of it. The swimming stinks here because there are no waves even little waves. What good is it without any waves and you never get scared or turned all over. You just swim out to this raft they got with a buddy. My buddy is Charles Masters. He is a rat and sings in the dining room all the time.

He is on the white team and is the captain of it. He and Mr. Grover are 2 of the biggest rats I ever met yet, also Mrs. Grover. She tries to be like your mother and smiles all the time but she is mean like Mr. Grover too. They lock the bread box at night so nobody can make sandwiches and they fired Jim and everything you get here you have to give 5¢ or 10¢ for and Robby wilcoks parents did not give him any money. I will be home soon probly sunday. I sure miss you Kenneth also Vincent also Phoebe. What color hair has Phoebe got. It is probly red I bet.

Your
brother Holden Caulfield

Kenneth put the letter and envelope back into his hip pocket. He picked up a smooth reddish pebble and looked at it, turning it over, as though he were hoping there were no flaws in its symmetry; then he said more to the pebble than to me: "He can't make any compromises." He looked at me bitterly. "He's just a little old kid and he can't make any compromises. If he doesn't like Mr. Grover he can't sing in the dining room even when he knows if he sings that everybody'll leave him alone. What's gonna happen to him Vincent?"

"I guess he'll have to learn to make compromises," I said, but I didn't believe it and Kenneth knew it.

Kenneth stuck the smooth pebble into his watch pocket of his shorts and looked out at the ocean with his mouth open.

"You know what?" he said. "If I were to die or something, you know what I would do?"

He didn't wait for me to say anything.

"I'd stick around," he said. "I'd stick around a while."

His face got triumphant – the way Kenneth's face got triumphant; without implications of his having defeated or outdrawn anybody. The ocean was terrible now. It was full of bowling balls. Kenneth stood up from the Wise Guy Rock, looking very happy about something. From the way he stood up I could tell he was in a mood for a swim. I didn't want him to go swimming around in all those bowling balls.

He yanked off his shoes and socks. "C'mon, lets go in" he said.

"You gonna wear those shorts?" I asked him. "You'll be cold on the way back. The sun's gone down."

"I have another pair under the seat of the car. C'mon. Let's go."

"You'll get cramps, from the clams."

"I only ate three."

"No, don't –" I started to stop him. He was pulling off his shirt and didn't hear me.

"What?" he said when his face was in the clear.

"Nothing. Don't stay in long."

"Aren't you gonna come in?"

"No. I haven't a cap." He thought that was pretty funny, and slammed me back.

"Aw, c'mon in, Vincent."

"You go ahead. I can't stand that ocean today. It's full of bowling balls."

He didn't hear me. He ran down the flat of the beach. I wanted to grab him and haul him back and drive off fast.

When he was finished kidding around in the water he came out by himself, without my being able to tell anything. He stepped out of and past the wet-ankle, sloshy part of the water; he even rushed and passed the dry, faint-footprint part of the flat without my being able to tell anything except that his head was down. Then, as he barely reached the soft of the beach, the ocean threw its last bowling ball at him. I yelled his name at the top of my voice, and ran crazily to the spot. Without even looking at him I picked him up; carrying him, I ran jerky-legged to the car. I put him in the seat and drove the first mile or so with the brakes on; then I gave it everything I had.

I saw Holden sitting on the porch before he saw me or anything. He had a suitcase next to the chair, and he was picking his nose until he saw. When he saw, he screamed Kenneth's name.

"Tell Mary to call the doctor." I said, out of breath. "The number's on the thing by the phone. In red pencil."

Holden screamed Kenneth's name again. He pushed out his crummy-looking hand and pushed, nearly struck, some sand off Kenneth's nose.

"Quickly, Holden, damn it!" I said, carrying Kenneth past him. I felt Holden rush through the house to the kitchen after Mary.

A few minutes later, even before the doctor arrived, my mother and father drove into the driveway. Gweer, who was playing the juvenile lead in the show, was with them. I signaled to mother from the window in Kenneth's room, and she ran like a girl into the house. I spoke to her for a minute in the room; then I went downstairs, passing my father on the stairs.

Later, when the doctor and my mother and father were all upstairs in Kenneth's room, Holden and I waited around on the porch. Gweer, the juvenile, hung around too for some reason. At last he said to me quietly, "I guess I'll be going."

"All right," I said vaguely. I didn't want any actors around.

"If there's anything - "

"Go home, willya fella?" Holden said.

Gweer smiled at him sadly, and started to leave. He didn't seem to like his exit. He was also curious after his little chat with Mary, the maid. "What is it - his heart?

He's only a kid, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Go home. Willya?"

Later on I felt like laughing. I told Holden the ocean was full of bowling balls, and the little dope nodded and said,

"Yeah, Vincent," as though he knew what I was talking about.

He died at ten after eight that night.

Maybe setting all this down will get him out of here. He's been in Italy with Holden, and he's been in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and part of Germany with me. I

can't stand it. He shouldn't be sticking around these days.

End

Birthday Boy

J.D. Salinger

Miss Collins was coming out of his room, having little trouble closing the double doors behind her despite the tray of used luncheon dishes she carries. It seemed to the approaching Ethel that Miss Collins was always coming out of his room.

"How is he today? Ethel hospital whispered.

"Oh Mrs. Nicolson!" Miss Collins greeted loudly, as though saluting a relative thought dead 20 years, "Oh, he's much better." He was always much better. Miss Collins with a veiny, capable hand raised the cover from the largest plate. "Just had his lunch, ate his chop, the potato, but wouldn't touch the carrots," He was always not touching something.

"Can I go in for a minute?" Ethel asked. "I mean he isn't asleep?"

"Sleep?" said Miss Collins, "That Man?"

Ethel tiptoed into the room. The head of Ray's bead was cranked up to prop him into a sitting position. Ray sat. His light brown hair was neatly combed, as though by a mother, and the lapels of his polka-dot robe were drawn close to his almost beardless throat.

He looked at Ethel, the dull expression on his face unaltered. It appeared as though it were his business to be sitting there just so.

"Ethel's here. Hello, sweetie." - this, shutting the inner double door. "My sitting-up sweetie." She went over to him, bent, and kissed him wetly with an MMmm square on the mouth, a gesture for the like of which Mr. Pierce, at the shop, would have given her an apartment in the 50s. "Happy birthday, darling. Happy, happy, happy, happy birthday."

"Thanks. Hey. You're leaning on my stomach."

She sat down in the straight chair to the right of his bed and took his hand in hers.

"My birthday boy."

"Uh."

"Why didn't you eat your carrots? Will you kindly tell me?"

"Somebody chewed them before they got to me/"

Ethel giggled, which she did very well.

"Miss Collins maybe. She looks like she goes around eating people's carrots. 22 year old birthday boy's carrots."

Ray grunted.

"Sweetie, you must eat," Ethel told him.

He took his hand out of hers and looked out the window to his left. There was the other side of the building to see.

"Look at me," Ethel ordered. "22. The man's catching up to me."

The cowlick at the back of his head was plastered down.

"Hey, look at me," Ethel said.

"Oh for Chrissake."

"No Ray. Look at me."

He turned to her abruptly, making a wide imitation smile out of his mouth. Ethel giggled. Then Ray let his eyes focus dopily on the foot of his bed.

"You ought to hear Miss Collins call me 'Mrs. Nicolson'. It kills me every time.

"I hate her," Ray informed in the monotone he was using. "I hate her guts."

"She has freckles. Like me."

Ray seemed to think that over. Then he flopped a hand offside the bed to squeeze her left.

"Was your father in today?" Ethel asked him.

"Yeah. Dropped in to cheer me up. Told me how much money he's losing this month.

"I brought you a book," Ethel told him. "It's not your present, though. That hasn't come yet. But wait'll you see it. It's gorgeous. I wish I had one myself."

"Yeah. Please don't give me any wrist watches. I have three wrist watches.

"It isn't a wrist watch. What'd your father give you?"

"Nothing. He didn't know it was my birthday. What book you got there?"

"Didn't you tell him? I should think his secretary would know!"

"What book?" Ray said.

Ethel looked down at the book on her lap.

"Heaven I'm Yours" Phyllis lent it to me she raved about it.
Want me to read to you?"

"Is it dirty?"

"I didn't ask her," Ethel said, and flipped through the pages looking for dialogue.

"Read me one of the dirty parts."

"I'll begin at the beginning."

Ethel proceeded to read aloud, which she did neither badly nor well. The first chapter began: Stephen Dwight drew on his immaculate chamois gloves and signaled for a taxi. "Where to, sir?" asked a grubby cabby. "Tower Apartments, as quickly as possible." Instructed Stephen Dwight in his authoritative, resonant voice.

"Listen," Ray interrupted. "You know what you can do with Steven Dwight and his gloves."

Ethel pseudo-sighed, and shut the book. "Did you go up on the roof this morning? She asked.

"No. Yeah."

"You did or you didn't."

"Yeah. They wheeled me next to an old guy who talked my ears off."

"What'd he talk about? What was the matter with him?"

"I don't know. Gall stones. He has a boy at Yale who looks like me. Only husker. How old am I and what do I do for a living and what's wrong with me anyhow. Jesus God."

"What'd you say? Ethel wanted to know.

"What the hell's the difference what I said?"

"Nobody recognize you? Old Joe Rotogravure."

"No. Gimme a cigarette," Ray said.

Ethel took a cigarette from a leather case in her handbag, lighted it, careful of lipstick. She got up, sat on the edge of his bed, and put the cig between his lips. He took two very deep drags with his eyes shut' then he smoked for a while normally, and looked out the window. Finally he turned to her slowly. The

mouth didn't change from the sluggish repose, but the eyes had warmth.

"Get the hell of this bed, Collins."

"Nope"

"Get off or get in."

"Nope."

"Let's see here a minute."

"No. Somebody might come in. Ray."

"Nobody'll come in."

"Yes. Leggo."

There was a long kiss, and passion a very remote part of it. Then Ethel broke, and returned to the straight chair. Ray had begun to cry during the kiss. The wobbly of his lips had been her cue.

"Ray" Ethel said from the chair. "Ray, who do you think I saw today?"

What he tried to answer sounded like "...give a goddamn who you saw."

"Helen Masterson." Ethel was leaning far forward, "She came in to look at a dress. Smothered in mink. Phyllis was at the door when she came in. Said Masterson went right up to Pierce and asked for me to show her the blue job in Vogue- the one I showed you? Do you remember?"

Ray was jamming his hands through his hair, as thought the pressure of his fingers could do away with it all.

"So I had to show it to her. What do you think was the first thing she said to me? But immediately. 'How's Ray?' I said you were fine. Then she asked me when we were going to be married. I said as soon as you got back from Chicago."

Every time he inhaled, his lower lip got jerked in, making a thhhtttt sound.

"I don't know why I said Chicago, except it was the furthest place I could think of except California and that was too far."

Ray was wiping his wet face with a corner of the pillow.

"She bought the blue job and two others. One gorgeous one."

Ethel got up, walked to the window and stood with her back to him. There was that thhhtttt sound behind her. Finally it subsided, as if he had got control of his lip, and only the jerking of his throat was audible.

Ethel—

"What?"—not turning.

"C'mere."

"I'm all right here."

"No, cmere."

"I'm all right here. I'm counting bricks."

"Ethel. Listen. Get me a drop. That's all I want. Just a lousy drop. Ethel. For Chrissake."

"I thought you weren't going to do that."

"But listen. All I want is a drop. I only wanna test myself. That's all. Ethel. You know goddamn well a lousy drop won't hurt me any. Ethel. Turn your lousy face around here!"

She turned. "I can't Ray. You know I can't. Why do you ask me."

"You can! You know goddamn well you can. You can bring me a lousy drop. That's all I want. On y word of honor. Don't you want me to test myself? Don't you want me to get better? Look at me!"

"Please. You're going to be on the floor in a minute." She went over to him, and he got her by the forearm.

"Ethel. Lover, Please. One stinking lousy drop. Listen. I've got an angle. Wait'll you hear. You can put it in a toilet water bottle. And leave it in this goddamn table. Nobody'll know the difference. I can test myself. Hear?"

"I hear."

"-But will you? Will you do it? Lover?"

"Noooo! Please." She yanked her arm free from him. There was no grip in his hand.

He slammed his mussed head back into the pillow, thinned the mouth that wobbled at the kiss, narrowed his eyes. There was trouble breathing.

"All right," he told her, breathy. "You bitch."

Ethel was back at the window.

"You love me. Oh, you love me! You love me like hell, you love me. What a liar. What a lousy little liar you are. Listen. Go on. Beat it. Get the hell out of here. Come on. You heard me. Get the hell out of here."

The both heard someone rap on the door. Dr. Stone came in looking small and sanitary.

"Well!" said Dr. Stone. "What's this? Visitors?" A smile for Ethel.

"I was just leaving," Ethel told the doctor. She crossed to pick up Phyllis's book, smoothing her skirt as she moved.

"And how's this big goldbrick today?" Asked Dr. Stone. "How do you feel son?"

For answer, Ray turned over on his side.

"I'll see you tomorrow, Ray." Ethel said.

Ray had most of his face in the pillow. "If you come back here I'll kill you. Get out."

"Whoa!" said Dr. Stone. "Whoa, there!" Whoa, there, Bessie."

Dr. Stone lent a hand at the double doors, and walked down the corridor at Ethel's side.

"I think we'll flush his kidneys this afternoon." Dr Stone told her.

"Yes," Ethel said.

"The Human body's like any machine, you know. Must be kept clean."

"Yes," Ethel repeated.

Dr. Stone's nose made a brief snorty sound, doing away with some sort of obstruction in his nasal passages.

"It's his birthday," Ethel said.

"Well!" said Dr. Stone. "I didn't know that!"

"He's 22."

Then because the elevator was there, and people were standing in it, there was nothing for Ethel to do but get in.

"Goodbye," Ethel said.

"Goodbye!" Said Dr. Stone, taking his pince-nez from his nose.

The elevator descended with a draft, chilling Ethel in all the damp spots.

End

Paula

J.D. Salinger

On the fourth of May 1941 Hincher returned home from work at 6:30 to discover his wife sitting up in bed reading. Hincher inquired affectionately:

"What's the matter? Don't you feel well?"

"Not too well," said Mrs. Hincher, setting down her book.

"Oh." Said Hincher "Getting up for dinner?"

"I don't think so dear. Do you mind terribly?"

"No. No. Of course not. What are you doing? Reading?"

"Mmm" admitted Mrs. Hincher.

At the same time the following evening, Mrs. Hincher was still in bed.

"Shall I send for Dr. Bohler?" Mr. Hincher asked solicitously.

Mrs. Hincher laughed her warm, delicious laugh. "I don't think so dear." She said. : I don't think there's anything he can do."

"How so? What do you mean?" Hincher sat down on the edge of his wife's bed.

"You big nut!" said Mrs. Hincher good humouredly. "I'm going to have a baby."

Stupification set into Hincher's face, followed by sheer ecstasy. Then quickly he bent to kiss his wife first excitedly, then tenderly, and he began to make great promises and predictions. But he interrupted himself.

"I knew the damn fool was wrong" He exclaimed happily.

What did he say?

"Who, darling?"

"Dr. Bohler."

"Dr. Bohler!" said Mrs. Hincher contemptuously, but not unpleasantly. "Darling, a woman knows whether she's going to have a baby or not. At least this woman."

"But I thought—"

"—Darling, I know, I don't have to see Dr. Bohler or Dr. Whoosis-Whatsis. I know, I always knew I'd know."

"But I just thought—" said Hincher. I thought Dr. Bohler said you couldn't have one.
I mean didn't he say that?

Mrs. Hincher laughed gloriously. She reached up two hands and gently took her husband's concerned face between them.

"Darling, don't worry," said Mrs. Hincher, laughing softly. We're going to have a baby."

Finally, leaving the bedroom to wash up for dinner, Hincher called back:

"Getting up for dinner, sweetheart?"

"No, darling, I'd rather not."

Weeks and then months passed and Mrs. Hincher stayed in bed, leaving it only to make certain small, obvious excursions to her bathroom, to her bureau drawers, to her dressing table,-- and one afternoon when Sophie, the housemaid, begged off to see her dentist, Mrs. Hincher, in maroon wrapper and feathery mules, ventured downstairs to see if her Saturday Evening Post had been delivered. But all her little trips, side- and direct-considered, approximately 23 hours of the day, 165 hours of the week, 644 hours of the month, Mrs. Hincher resided under counterpane. She breakfasted, lunched and dined in bed. She read and knitted in bed, all current newspapers and magazines, bags of wool and graduated sizes of knitting needles, within her reach. There was a silver hand-bell on her night table. Two shakes of it, and Sophie, the maid, instantly dried her hands, or turned off the vacuum cleaner, or sniped her cigarette, and literally came running. Sophie received her instructions from Mr. Hincher at the same time he had raised her salary.

--Darling. Will you come here a minute?

Hincher re-entered his wife's bedroom.

"Darling, I'm going to ask something strange of you. You'll probably think I'm utterly mad.

Hincher smiled, "What is it little girl?"

"I want to stay in bed, sweet. I mean I want to stay in bed all during my time."

"Nine months?" said Hincher, incredulously.

"Mmm. I want to. Are you furious with me? You are. I can tell. I see that sever look coming on your face." Mrs. Hincher smiled up at her husband, pursed her lips slightly, and nodded to herself.

"No," her husband denied quickly. "Of course, I'm not furious. But why do you want to stay in bed? I mean why do you want to stay in bed?

Mr. Hincher waited.

"You'll laugh." Accused Mrs. Hincher gently.

"I will not"

"Yes, you will"

"Darling," said Hincher, sitting down again on the edge of his wife's bed. "What a thing to say."

Mrs. Hincher clasped her husband's hand, as though to say what she had to say required his proximate strength. Mrs. Hincher spoke slowly. Her voice cool and brave, and yet Hincher detected a faint, a very faint note of fear.

"I so desperately want our baby born safely, darling. I'm afraid of falling. I'm afraid of a thousand things." Mrs. Hincher paused, suddenly squeezed her husband's hand, as though some sharp, horrible image had come to frighten her mind's eye. She continued. "Cars and trucks and things. I'm so afraid. And if I stay in bed I'll be sage with my thoughts of you and baby."

The word "baby" sans the preceding definite article completely disarmed and waylaid Mr. Hincher's heart. He replied to his wife in an exceedingly husky voice but with slight command in his voice.

"You stay in bed. You just stay in bed as long as you like."

Mrs. Hincher's reply, despite its brevity, seemed to identify Mr. Hincher's immortality.

"Darling" she pronounced simply.

Mr. Hincher patted his wife's hand and repeated, "You just stay in bed as long as you like."

They seemed to share a moment of profoundest silence. Mrs. Hincher broke it, but apparently only with great reluctance.

"Darling, there's just one other thing. Don't tell anybody. I mean don't tell anybody that I'm in bed. Say I've gone back to New York to stay with my sister. Say my sister's sick."

"But why?" Hincher inquired gently.

"They'll laugh." Said Mrs. Hincher simply. "They'll all laugh. I know it."

"No they won't." Hincher denied belligerently.

"They will. I know they will." Said his wife thoughtfully. "Ruth Simpkins would. I can just hear her laughing at me."

"That fool woman," dismissed Hincher.

"Yes, darling, but she'd laugh. They all would. I know it.
-Darling, say you'll tell them I've gone to New York to be with my
sister. So they won't know I'm home. You can make believe
you're coming to visit me weekends. You can go drive to the
Cape and go fishing. You can go fishing. Sophie can do the
marketing. She—

Mr. Hincher was a little startled. Mrs. Hincher's cool, lovely voice had begun to take on excitement. It was strangely unbecoming, Hincher found and abruptly held up the hand Mrs.' Hincher wasn't holding.

--wait a minute

--"Now" Mr. Hincher held up a hand, mock traffic cop style.
"Whoa there. Whoa there Nellie."

He was a little startled. Mrs. Hincher's cool lovely voice had begun to take on excitement. It was strangely unbecoming.

Abruptly, Mrs. Hincher removed her hand from her husband's. She neither wrenched it away nor slipped it away. She merely removed it.

"You are laughing at me, too." She said dully.

Hincher was frightened. "No, honey!" he swore to her. "No, I'm not. I'll do anything you say, little girl."

Quietly, Hincher reclaimed his wife's hand. "No, No, No, little girl," he swore to Mrs. Hincher's sudden profile.

She turned to him slowly. Hincher waited for exoneration, almost frantically for some look, some word of exoneration. Mrs. Hincher's face conveyed nothing. She looked at her husband and yet beyond him.

"We'll have it just the way you want it," Hincher said. "Just the way you want it."

Mrs. Hincher's eyes gentled into focus.

"I knew you'd understand." She said.

Almost every weekend Mr. Hincher went fishing off Cape Cod. It usually seemed that he had enjoyed his weekend immensely; for late Sunday nights when he stomped in his wife's bedroom to let her peak under soggy newspapers at his catch, Hincher's face under the watty little light of Mrs. Hincher's bed-lamp was a happy one.

But it takes five weekdays to make a week-end.

Hincher was a very poor liar. But fortunately little enough skill was required of him. No one in Otisville doubted that Mrs. Hincher had gone to Akron, Oh to be with her sick sister. So when Hincher, with awkward gravity, reported his sister-in-law's condition as Better, or Not Much better. Or They Can't Tell Yet, the usual reply to him was It All Takes Time, or Send Paula Out Love. With practice Hincher's lying improved. He learned in time that he felt surer of himself when he chuckled out his lies, rather than when he delivered them gravely.

"Guess I'll have to get me a new wife," Hincher innovated one day (with a chuckle)/

"Why don't you wait till the new models come out," suggested Bud Montrose.

Hincher immediately pirated Bud Montrose's wit. And the standard Hincher Chuckle Lie then sounded in full:

"Guess I'll have to get me a new wife. Chuckle. Waiting for the new models to come out. (Chuckle, Chuckle.)

..But he never learned to lie expertly enough to rest assured of no justified, but extremely loud accusation in a small, crowded room.

Evenings, the Hincher's usually played seven or eight eleven-point games of casino.

Evenings, the Hincher's usually played casino. Mr. Hincher sat on the edge of Mrs. Hincher's bed, and a pretty white bed table was straddled gently over Mrs. Hincher's legs.

Evening, after Hincher had eaten alone in the dining room, he re-joined his wife, and usually the played several games of casino. Mr. Hincher would sit on the edge of Mrs. Hincher's bed, and a pretty white bedtable was straddled gently over Mrs. Hincher's legs. Generally they played until 9:30 or 9:45, at which time Mrs. Hincher often said: "Shall we read a little, darling?"

Grand, Hincher often said, and he would cross the room to fetch the book of Mrs. Hincher's choice.

Of David Copperfield, Mrs. Hincher told Mr. Hincher:

"I love it, I've always loved it. How is it you've never read it, darling?"

"I don't know." Hincher said. "Never got the time."

"I love it," said Mrs. Hincher, "Only I hate the Murdstone's. I'll skip all the parts about the Murdstone's."

"Who are they?" Inquired Hincher.

"Davy's stepfather and his sister. They're horrible, Wait and see. No, I'm going to skip the parts where the Murdstone's come in."

Paula laughed deliciously. [Handwritten note on manuscript]

Hincher sat back in an easy chair drawn close to David Copperfield, deleting all Murdstone passages. She read magnificently, gruffing her voice to sound like Dan Peggotty's, debonairing it to suggest Steerforth's, clammed it for Uriah Heep's sake, jeep'd it for the sake of Dora. She was perfectly cast in each role.

AT midnight, usually, Mrs. Hincher stopped reading. She closed the book, and smiled at MR. Hincher.

Tired? He's say quickly.

A little darling.

You go to sleep, then. That's enough reading for tonight?

Did you enjoy it?

Swell book. Get under the covers, now. I'll tuck you in.

--Hincher slept in the guest room all during these months.

She first took to her husband, Bud, tell what he know to

[crossed out in manuscript]

Ruth and Carl Perkins were at Emily and Bud Edmundson's. At first while, Bud talked Perkins constantly rummaged a hand through a bowl of assorted nuts, singling out the pistachios. Then Carl Perkins suddenly stopped eating altogether.

"He came here last Saturday Night."

Emily and I had just come in from the movies. And I
[handwritten in manuscript] see Frank's car parked in the driveway. I pulled up behind it, threw on my night lights, and went around to see what was what. Frank was sitting in his car.

Frank! I said. What're you doing here?

I have to see you.

Well, come one inside, I said.

We went inside. He wouldn't let me take his overcoat from him. He said he wanted to see me alone, and so Emily went upstairs. And Frank and I sat down in the living room. He still didn't take off his coat.

"I drove up to your place on Tuesday," I said to him. How come your phone's disconnected? Why wouldn't the maid let me in? What's going on anyway?"

What the hell. I'm his partner. I had a right to ask where he'd been when he hadn't showed up for work all week. Know what I mean?

Frank sat there as though he hadn't really come to say anything to me. It was more as though he'd come to stare at the piano. He looked like hell. I think the reason he didn't take off his coat was because he didn't have any jacket on underneath. I could see, anyway, that he didn't have any necktie on.

"Is something wrong with Paula?" I said.

"Did you head some bad news about her sister or something?"

"She doesn't have any sister," Frank said.

Wuddaya mean? I said. That's who she's visiting isn't it? Her sister's dying, isn't she? I mean she's pretty sick, isn't she?

Frank shook his head. "No," he says, "Paula's home all the time. She's been home in bed to have a baby. She didn't want to walk

around and get run over when she was going to have a baby. So she stayed home in bed.

How long has she been in bed? I asked him.

"I don't know," Frank said. Ten months.

She's been gone over a year, I told him.

I tell you she didn't go anyplace," Frank said. She's been out of bed two months. She's been in her room. With the door locked.

With the door locked! I said. Did she have the baby?

She says so, Frank said. She says she did. I don't know.

You should have heard his voice. I mean you could hardly hear him.

Wuddaya mean? I said. She says she had a baby. Don't you know?

She says she did, Frank said. But I don't know. I came home one night a couple of months ago and the door was locked. I banged on the door and asked her if she was fine. She said she was having the baby.

Frank said he asked her if he should send for Dr. Bohler. Paula said no, that she didn't need any doctor. Frank asked her if she was in any pain. Paula told him she felt marvelous. There was only one thing she wanted him to do. Frank asked her what it was. What do you think she said?

"She said, "Go out in the garden and rub two roses together." That was all she needed.

"My God!" I said to Frank. "You didn't do it, did you? Didn't you send for Dr. Bohler?"

"She didn't want me to send for Dr. Bohler," Frank said. She said she didn't need him.

Can you imagine?

"Well" I said. "You didn't go out in the garden and rub two roses together, did you?"

He said, yes.

"What in the hell for?" I asked him.

"She wanted me to." Frank said.

So he did it! He went out in the garden and rubbed two roses together. Then he runs upstairs to the bedroom (the door's still locked, mind you), and Paula tells him the baby's born. But she wouldn't let Frank come in to see it. It was better for her to be alone with it for awhile. Frank asked if it was a boy or a girl. Paula tells him it's a girl. She tells him it's a beautiful girl with blonde hair and blue eyes.

Frank asked her if she needed anything. Paula said she didn't need a thing. Frank asked her to please open the door. She wouldn't do it, thought. I said to Frank, "By God, I'd have broken the damn thing in."

Frank just shook his head. He said I didn't know Paula. She was very sensitive, he said.

Well, two months went by and still Paula wouldn't let him come in to see either her or the baby. She didn't even let the maid in. She never even opened the door except at mealtime, and then it was only for the maid to shove a tray of food in to her.

She just stayed in that room wit the baby. And Frank, when he came home from the office in the evening, would talk to her

through the door. She'd tell him what the baby did all day, how it stuck its foot in its mouth and all that. Frank would ask her if she needed anything. Sometimes she did. The baby needed a crib or the baby needed a bottle. You know. Stuff babies need. And Frank would bring the stuff home in his car and Paula'd open the door wide enough to let him shove it through without seeing her or the baby.

Then one day Paula tells him the baby should have a playmate. Not exactly a playmate, but it should have some child near it occasionally. She said she seriously believe a child's most formative period was during its infancy. She said to Frank, "I'll bet you think I'm crazy." Frank told her no, but was getting damn sick and tired of not being allowed to see his own child. Paula laughed and begged him to be patient awhile.

Well, Frank had their maid bring her niece to the house. A little kid about 3 years old. And the kid was allowed to see the baby.

Frank says to the kid when it comes out of the bedroom, "Did you see the baby?"

"Yes," says the kid, very emphatically.

"What's it look like? A littler girl, eh?" Frank asked her.

It's a little baby and it can't talk

The kid said it was a little baby and it couldn't talk and it was in a crib sleeping. You know how kids talk.

Well, a couple of weeks later Frank busted down the door.

--I tell ya you won't believe it.

Paula was in the crib. Frank said she had her legs pulled up so that her knees were kind of jamming her in the chin. She had

her hair fixed like kids wear their hair, and she had it tied with this big red ribbon. Except for that ribbon, she didn't have a stitch of clothes on. Not a stitch. Naked as a baby.

What do you think she says to Frank?

She says, pulling the blanket over her, "I think you're mean. I think you're the meanest man I've ever met."

She made him get out of the room. Then he came over to our place. He was at our place just sitting in the room.

I told him he ought to go away. I told him he and Paula needed a good long vacation.

I've got a postcard from them today, ---Emily, what'd you do with the post card?

The Hincher's went to Florida. Hincher became horrible violent in the lobby of the Plaza Hotel. The assistant manager and a big colored elevator boy held him down, he was removed to the Lakewood home.

Paula returned to Otisville and several months later resumed her work as a librarian. She still there today doing a brilliant job of it.

End

Letter to John Woodman

Dear Mr. Woodman:

Both sets of proofs enclosed. They look in good shape. I've made one or two marks on the new set, but nothing special. Many thanks.

The slight mixup in proofs was pretty funny. I thought I was going nuts, but that's nothing new.

I tried both phone numbers you gave me, this past weekend, but I have an idea you were on your way from one place to the other while the call was going through. A nice little kid answered the Framingham number, but I don't think he had a duplicate set of proofs, so I dumped the whole thing into my agent's lap.

Hope you don't mind. I don't have a phone down here.

Regards, added thanks.

Sincerely,

JD Salinger

INCLUDES:

AN OCEAN FULL OF
BOWLING BALLS

PAULA

BIRTHDAY BOY



5 800078 276643